



'to ensure that every child has an amazing playtime every day with no exceptions'. (OPAL CIC)



## 2023—A Review

What a busy and rewarding year it has been in terms of OPAL here in our school! The children have developed so much in their play, making the most of every opportunity and carefully considering risk and how to reduce it. We are incredibly proud of our school community for all that has been achieved so far and we cannot wait to see what 2024 brings to play at our school.

### **Play Assemblies**

We have held regular Play Assemblies throughout the year and look forward to these opportunities to share ideas as a school community. Each assembly takes the same format, beginning with a celebration of play since the last assembly. We list what is going well outside and then often share photos, and sometimes short videos, of children playing (children love to see themselves on the screen), and children are invited to come to the front and talk about their play in the picture if they would like to—children from Reception to Year 2 often do choose to and are extremely brave standing in front of the rest of the school. Next, we have reminders as needed. This section often includes a reminder about careful storing of our wellies and waterproofs, as well as the agreed rules for safe use of particular resources. Finally, the part the children are always excited to hear... what is new to use, or what is coming soon. This is the time when everyone, children and adults, work together to consider safe use of our equipment and we create rules for everyone to follow. By doing this together, it gives everyone the responsibility to follow them. The children always impress us with their careful thinking about risks and how to reduce them. We share the notes from our assemblies on the OPAL noticeboard and use these to remind children when needed.

### **New Areas and Resources**

Play and outdoor opportunities have really grown this year with the addition of a number of new areas and lots of new resources. We are extremely grateful to individuals, families and local businesses for supporting us in our play development, without this support none of these things would have been possible to introduce or maintain. Particular thanks go to Mr Kelly and Mr Elliot for their hard work. Please see photos for some of the new additions in 2023. The children really do love the different opportunities on offer.

### **New Partnership with Pickering Environment Group**

Linked to OPAL and our wider outdoor learning opportunities, Pickering Environment Group (PEG) have kindly been working with us to develop our wildflower area over a three year period. They have been very generous in their time, hard work, expertise and advice and in helping us to source new things. We really look forward to continuing to work with them to further develop the natural side of our school environment. Through their support, we have a new Bug Hotel and a Bee Bank within our wildflower area and a bird table and feeders, along with a good supply of food, increasing opportunities for children to take time to quietly watch the birds feeding from the hide at the bottom of the field. We have noticed a big increase in bird numbers recently. Thanks go to JT Atkinsons, Coopers of Pickering and Hallgarth Accountants for their generous donations towards these projects. Please look out for opportunities to come along and help with the next stages of development.

## **Learning through Landscapes Local School Nature Grant**

Our OPAL work has helped us to be awarded a Local Schools Grant which will provide the school with £500 worth of equipment linked to growing, solar power and investigating nature in the school environment. It also provides CPD for staff focusing on outdoor learning and play. The grant panel were impressed by the children's involvement in decision making for the developments of our school grounds and our community links with PEG, as well as our plans for ways to sustain this.

## **Your say**

Thank you to all those families who were willing and able to complete the OPAL questionnaire back in July 2023. We really appreciate your feedback and this has fed into our plans since September 2023. We really do want to hear what you think at any time of year, not just when the questionnaires come out. If you have an idea for play development, can help with sourcing items, can give some time to help develop new areas, are creative, feel there is something we could improve or perhaps would like to join the lunchtime team and be part of the fun, please do get in touch via the school office.

## **Next steps—2024 and beyond**

As always, the children will be heavily involved in the decision making for next steps. It is only the middle of January and we already have a new stage area (bigger and better than our previous one) and a new 'Book Nook' pallet shelter. We also have two large wooden spools we have been given and are deciding what to do with to make the best use for the children.

We are looking for more natural resources for the children, so if you know of anyone with tree stumps or slices, or a larger piece of trunk, they would like to donate, or larger rocks for our small world and construction areas, please do suggest school as a possible new home for them.

We are developing a new role within Year 2, and will be introducing Play Champions to help develop good practice and share ideas.

There will be more opportunities for you to come and have a go and play with the children coming soon.

Keep watching for new developments across the school and let's look forward to another year of great fun.

## **Your ongoing support—thank you!**

Play can be messy! We appreciate your support in providing children with appropriate clothing and footwear, and for your understanding when they do come home rather messy. Children spend a lot of time creating their own inventions/structures with the loose parts and to maximise play opportunities, these are often left out during the week—this is not because we don't care, it is quite the opposite and helps the children have time to go back and change their den or vehicle, continue to cook the family meal, or whatever it is they are doing on a later occasion. We appreciate your understanding and acceptance of this and look forward to you seeing many more of the children's creations.

# In 2023 we...

opened the Learning Lodge as an 'Imagination Space' with small world, role play, games



created a construction area alongside the digging area



opened our deluxe mud kitchen and mud cafe



added to our small world play environments



reused our old indoor stage as one was asked for by the children. We did get rather messy splattering it with paint in the holidays!



created new spaces to relax and play



developed our wildlife area, with the help of Pickering Environment Group

and most importantly, we continued to have lots of fun!